

A Merciful Father

The Bible says in Psalm 103:13, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him." These beautiful words from the Old Testament tell us so much about God, our Heavenly Father. And by the way, they are from the Old Testament. Far too many people try to separate the God of the Old Testament from the God of the New Testament. But please understand, He is one and the same. Malachi 3:6: "For I *am* the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." Hebrews 13:8: "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." I love what John Brown, a great old preacher from England said many years ago: "The Old and New Testaments are the two lips with which God speak to us." And by observation, He has so much to say. In Matthew 12 the Pharisees were rebuking Jesus for not chiding His hungry disciples who had just harvested some corn for a snack on the Sabbath Day. Then our Lord took the Pharisees back to the Old Testament when David allowed his men to eat the showbread from the Temple. Then Jesus said, "But if ye had known what *this* meaneth, I will have mercy..." (Matthew 12:7a). Then later on in the chapter Jesus said, "A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench..." (Matthew 12:20a). This passage informs us that God is merciful to the broken, abused and misused people in life. I love the comment of the Puritan, Richard Sibbes on this passage: "There is more mercy in Christ than sin in us." Actually, Sibbes is also noted for saying it in another way, "There is more grace in Christ than sin in us." So we see our Lord bringing the Old and New Testaments together, revealing the heart of the Father.

In I Thessalonians 2:11, Paul likened his own responsibility to the church at Philippi to being a father: "As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children." On this Father's Day morning, I want us to think about the heart of the father.

1. A MERCIFUL FATHER TEACHES HIS CHILD THE RIGHT WAY.

Deuteronomy 6:4-7, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." I have often said that although my dad was a great man of God in the pulpit, I profited more from his teaching outside the pulpit.

Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." I have heard this verse explained many different ways one being, that a child, when taught a certain way, would never depart from that way at all. However, have known far too many servants of the Lord who have taught their children the right way and backed it up by their impeccable testimonies and yet experienced the heartbreak of prodigal children. Even our Lord illustrates in His story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 of a loving father who was obviously living right, but whose son left for the wild and wooly world. I have

also read that Proverbs 22:6 is referring to finding the way, in other words, the bent the child is naturally leaning toward, and agree with God's direction and lead that child in the way of their natural inclination. I can see the wisdom of this teaching, but yet, I do not see the comfort afforded the parent of a prodigal. I began to meditate over this verse more carefully and saw something I had not seen before. The Hebrew word for "depart" is *suwr*, the root of which means to turn off. Further examination shows it means to call back, decline, eschew, lay away, leave undone, be past, pluck away, put away, put down, or be without. This is an amazing and comforting realization! Think of it! No matter how far a child reared in a godly environment may go, he or she will never be able to turn off, put aside, do away with or be without what you have taught them. This should encourage every parent who has ever wondered if his or her prodigal will ever return. I hope to address this thought with hope at the end of this message.

2. A MERCIFUL FATHER ALLOWS HIS CHILD TO FAIL.

In I Samuel 3:13 says, "...his (Eli) sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." This was the first prophecy that God assigned to Samuel to give to the priest, Eli. The word "restrained" in Hebrew is *kahah*, meaning to be weak or to fail. Very simply, one of the great temptations when our children have done wrong is we sometimes have a desire to break their fall. In truth, the best thing for some children, even our grown child, is to let them fall and hopefully the harsh result will be a wake-up call to turn and repent.

God made Adam and Eve, the acme of His creation. This sovereign God had the ability to break their fall, but He did not. We have a tendency to blame parents for the misbehavior of their children. The truth is we have all sinned and come short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). O that we might have the patience with our children as our Heavenly Father has had patience with us. Jesus said in Luke 21:19, "In your patience possess ye your souls." In other words, don't lose your cool in the midst of your trial. I appreciate the great Alexander MacLaren's comment on this verse: "For you know it is only 'what cannot be cured' that 'must be endured,' and even incurable things are not merely to be endured, but they ought to be utilized. It is not enough that we should build up a dam to keep the floods of sorrow and trial from overflowing our fields; we must turn the turbid waters into our sluices, and get them to drive our mills." Hebrews 10:36 says, "For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." This is a sweet promise of the payoff of being long-suffering. The verse is teaching us to be patient; don't wait for others to do right--you do right and see the promises that we may reap if we do not give up. Galatians 6:9, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

3. OUR MERCIFUL HEAVENLY FATHER IS MERCIFUL TO EARTHLY FATHERS.

In Ezekiel 18:2 the captive people of God are complaining that the only reason they are held captive is because of the sins of their fathers. They use the proverb that because the parents have eaten sour grapes, therefore their teeth

are set on edge. It is true Deuteronomy 5:9, 10 teaches that God will visit the iniquity of the fathers to the third and fourth generations, but immediately afterwards God declares that He will show mercy unto thousands that love and obey Him. The Lord is more than willing to break the cycle of inherited predispositions and give mercy to the openhearted and repentant. In Ezekiel 18:20 God discloses, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." So we see the reaffirmation of Deuteronomy 24:16 and II Kings 14:6, i.e., that God does not hold the godly father or innocent son accountable for the one that goes away from the spiritual moorings in which they were anchored. Romans 14:12 says, "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

Conclusion:

Where does this leave us? It leaves us at the mercies of God. When there is nothing humanly possible to do, we pray, trust and obey. Being left to the mercies of God is a wonderful place to be. Genesis 18:25c says, "...Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" He most certainly shall! Micah 7:18, 19 tells us in no uncertain terms that God delights in showing mercy.

What can we do? We can rely on God to have mercy in answer to our prayers. Nahum 1:7, "The LORD *is* good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him." Isaiah 59:1, "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." Jeremiah 33:3, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not. Matthew 7:11, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" Let us ask God to shower our children with that same mercy He showered on us!

-Pastor Pope-